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ABSTRACT

Public library use and librarians' knowledge of access to government documents were assessed through a survey of 108 participating public libraries in Kentucky in preparation for a one-day workshop providing instruction in government documents. Response rate was 43 percent. Community needs were determined by classification of the particular library's town on the basis of population, and nine survey items were selected to test the general knowledge of librarians on specific publications and terms; results indicated that a large percentage were not familiar with government publications and document sources of bibliographic information. One third of the libraries had never included government documents in their acquisitions program, and a simple majority had never visited the documents section at a depository library, indicating little awareness of government documents. Despite financial constraints, a majority agreed that money could be allocated for documents. The survey documented the need to provide for continuing education for public librarians in Kentucky. (CWM)

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USE OF GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS IN SMALL AND
MEDIUM-SIZED KENTUCKY LIBRARIES AND
FUTURE UTILIZATION PROSPECTS

by

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AND FUTURE UTILIZATION PROSPECTS

Preface

This study was initiated under the auspices of the Department of Library Science of Western Kentucky University and Dr. Jefferson Caskey. Utilization of the survey results will be by the Kentucky Department of Library & Archives, State Library Division.

Overview

Government documents are produced in ever increasing numbers and serve as a valuable information source on the national and local level. The primary producer of documents is the Government Printing Office with the Superintendent of Documents serving as sales agent for federal publications.

The number of depository libraries is determined by law, and the public access to documents on the local level is through these depository libraries, or through the local public library's acquisition of documents on a very limited basis.

Those institutions with libraries serving as selective depositories in Kentucky are the Hopkinsville Community College, Murray State University, Western Kentucky University, Kentucky Wesleyan College, Louisville Free Public Library, University of Louisville, University of Louisville Law School, Thomas More College, Union College, Eastern Kentucky University, Centre College, Kentucky Department of Library & Archives, Kentucky State University, State Law Library, University of Kentucky, Ashland Public Library, Northern Kentucky University, University of Kentucky Law Library, and Morehead State University. The University of Kentucky is designated as a regional library (one which receives all federal publications classed as depository items).

The selection of documents is complicated by the large number produced, access to review sources, obtaining full bibliographic information, and the order procedure for acquisition of documents from either the source or the Superintendent of Documents. On the local level many public librarians have not had the exposure necessary to utilize government documents as an information base and do very little ordering of government documents.

The survey

The need to determine public library use of documents and the librarians' own knowledge of access to government documents was viewed as the first stage in preparation of a one-day workshop to provide instruction in government documents. The workshop would be structured to provide learning opportunities for public librarians to better understand the documents available, the function of documents in information systems, and how to acquire and use documents to build a library collection, vertical file, or for bibliographic uses.

A survey was the research tool used to gain the necessary information. The sections of the survey were: 1.) Program data 2.) General knowledge of publications, guides, etc. 3.) Present use status 4.) Exposure to government documents 5.) Utilization of government documents 6.) Impressions 7.) Financial considerations 8.) Recommendations.

A secondary purpose of the survey was to call attention to government documents and to provide awareness of the State Library Division as a resource base and as a continuing education facilitator. Knowledge of documents would increase requests for documents from the Government Documents Section of the State Library Division.

Review of the Responses1.0 Program data

Survey response was poor -- thought to indicate that a much larger percentage of public librarians knew little of government documents and failed to utilize them than was indicated by the survey. Surveys were sent to 108 participating libraries in the State system and 46 were returned (43%).

An effort to determine the needs of the community was made by classifying the class of town in which the library was situated. Since most of the counties in Kentucky are rural, the towns are usually small. However, in some cases the county seat is one of several medium-sized towns within the county with a combined population equaling a county with a higher class city.

Towns are classed on the basis of population. The most recent edition of The State Directory of Kentucky was used to confirm the class. The results of the survey showed:

<u>Class</u>	<u>Town Reporting</u>	<u>Percentage of Return</u>
2nd	7	15
3rd	10	22
4th	19	41
5th	9	20
6th	1	1

Fifty percent of the population of the State was represented by the returned surveys. Over 400,000 persons within the 50% represented are not served by government documents in their counties.

The 61% of returns for cities classed 4th and 5th reflect the rural nature of Kentucky's libraries. It is assumed that rural areas have less of a need for information than urban; consequently, they would have less of a need for government documents than an urban area. The diversity of government documents, however, covers every aspect of human life and the publications of certain departments such as the Department of Agriculture could be useful in a rural community. Statistical information and socio-cultural studies have basic educational value to any community.

Only one official first class city is in Kentucky (Louisville). Since the Louisville Free Public Library is a selective depository and it is a large urban library, it was not included in the survey. Ashland Public Library is the only other public library in the State which is a depository library, but was included because the library serves a much smaller population than Louisville.

2.0 General knowledge of publications, guides, etc.

Nine items were selected to test the general knowledge of librarians of certain publications and terms relating to government documents. Those terms selected were ones which would likely be known by librarians and were ones to be included in the workshop design if lack of familiarity was evidenced. Results showed that a large percentage were not familiar with government publications and document sources of bibliographic information. A majority of respondents did not know what depository libraries were.

Librarians understandItem

76%	GPO (Government Printing Office)
67%	SUDOCs (Superintendent of Documents)
37%	NTIS (National Technical Information Service)
59%	<u>Monthly Catalog</u>
65%	<u>Selected List</u>
48%	<u>Index to U.S. Government Periodicals</u>
39%	<u>ERIC's Resources in Education</u>
54%	Regional Depositories
41%	Selective Depositories

The variation between those who said they understood the term "regional depositories" and "selective depositories" indicates that this percentage is inaccurate. Since only one library in Kentucky is a regional depository, it can be assumed that librarians misunderstand the term "regional" as it applies to depository libraries. If 54% knew that terminology, then the same percentage should know the meaning of "selective" depository.

The fact that over one fourth of the respondents ^{didn't} know what the Government Printing Office and the Superintendent of Documents were indicates a strong need for a workshop on documents.

3.0 Present use status

A section on present use measures those libraries whose librarians actually order documents and the librarians' understanding of the order procedure.

Sixty-five percent of the librarians have ordered documents from the Superintendent of Documents for their present or past libraries. Sixteen librarians (35%) indicated they had never ordered documents, so projections

are that one third of Kentucky libraries have never provided government documents in their acquisitions program.

Half of the librarians admitted to having trouble finding out what materials are available--indicating that they need to be made aware of review sources. Sixty-one percent said "yes" to knowing the sources from which government publications may be obtained and 57% understood the order procedure for government documents. Only 22% said they didn't understand the order procedure. Ten persons (22%) failed to respond to the question "do you understand the order procedure." Failure to respond may be assumed to be negative responses which gives an aggregate of 44% who don't understand the order procedure.

Librarians gave the following source of information for available documents of other government materials:

<u>Selected List</u>	13
<u>Booklist</u>	4
<u>Consumer Information Catalog</u>	2
<u>Monthly Catalog</u>	10

Sources receiving only one response were Distribution Center, Regional Depositories, SUDOCs, Index to U.S. Government Periodicals, ERIC, and Vertical File Index.

4.0 Exposure to government documents

Exposure to documents from college experiences or library visitation was felt to be an indicator of the awareness of librarians to and acquisition of government documents. A simple majority (54%) was found to have never visited or browsed through a government documents library at a depository library.

Librarians were asked if free government documents were ever received from a government agency, congressman, etc., as materials are available in this manner if requested. Seventy-eight percent said "yes." The other 22% are missing a good opportunity for complimentary copies from government sources.

5.0 Utilization of government documents

Utilization of government documents provides information on the actual attitudes of librarians toward documents within the library and the actual use of documents on hand.

Sixty-seven percent of the librarians have examined or used government documents for personal use although 78% said their library has documents on hand either in the cataloged collection or in the vertical file. The terminology "personal" may or may not include the librarian's use in searching reference requests for patrons.

The question was asked, "Does your library have any government documents on hand either as cataloged items, or available in your vertical (information) file?"

Yes - 78% No - 22%

If the response was "yes" to the previous question, the respondent was asked "Do you or the library staff make use of those government documents on hand in your library?"

Thirty persons of the 36 "yes" responses said "occasionally" and 6 persons said "often." One person answered "never."

If the response was "no" to the question given, the respondent was asked "Do you feel government documents could prove useful as resource (information) material in your library if made available."

Seven persons of the 10 "no" responses said "limited use," 7 said "moderate use," and 1 said "heavy" use.

There was an inconsistency in answering the previous questions for many librarians answered both regardless of their "yes" or "no" answer. The total responses were given to indicate attitudes, however.

Each person answering "yes" to having documents on hand was also asked "Do you consider government documents for 'reference only' material, or 'check-out' material."

Responses were:

Reference only - 22% Check-out - 50%

17% answered both to reference and check-out, and 11% left the question blank.

Whether librarians consider documents reference or circulating suggests a possible reason for acquiring them. The decision to catalog and shelve a document as opposed to placing it in a vertical file folder determines how much the document may be used, the importance placed upon it, and staff processing time. Those librarians considering documents as check-out think of them in the more popular vein of general information, narrative, and reading material. Those regarding documents as reference only will likely think of them as statistical, highly specialized documentary, and having less use than circulating material.

6.0 Impressions

Impressions of librarians were necessary to see how willing they might be to learn more about documents and utilize them to serve the public needs.

The following questions were asked:

"Is your first impression of government documents one that they are priced"

35% Cheaply

52% Reasonably

4% Too high

The response proves that the cost factor is not a reason against buying documents as a minimum of people regarded them as highly priced.

"Do you consider yourself and your support staff as knowledgeable of

government documents as much as you need to be for your library service?"

13% Yes

83% No

The 83% response of librarians who didn't consider themselves as knowledgeable as they needed to be led to a high response of persons who said they would order documents if they had an opportunity to learn more about the types of government documents available and if they learned how to locate useful government publications. Sixty-three percent said "yes" and only 17% said "no." The other 20% failed to respond.

Eightypercent would recommend government documents on a selected basis for libraries not using them and the same percentage of librarians wanted the Department of Library & Archives to supply regularly selected "useful" government documents. When asked if they would like for DLA to mail out regularly a suggested list of documents with practical need in a small or medium-sized public library, 98% said "yes." Ninety-three percent stated they would attend or send a staff member to a regional library workshop on selecting documents.

7.0 Financial considerations

Each librarian was asked to comment on the acquisitions budget to determine the monies which could be allocated for document purchase as part of collection development. A rather large percentage of libraries have acquisition budgets under \$10,000. Sixty-seven percent have budgets under \$10,000, and 22% have budgets between \$10,000 and \$25,000. Sixty-three percent, nevertheless, said a small amount could be made available from the present budget for ordering documents without hurting the acquisitions program. Only 17% said no money could be allocated for government documents.

Conclusions

The survey documented the need to provide for continuing education for public librarians in Kentucky. This was evident by the number of librarians who were not familiar with standard terms relating to government documents, the 35% which had never ordered documents, and the half which admitted to having trouble finding out what materials are available.

The librarians were honest in admitting that most did not know as much about government documents as each needed to be for providing library service, and the majority indicated they would order documents if they had an opportunity to learn more about them.

The Department of Library & Archives received good support from the librarians in the 80% who indicated they would like the Department to supply regularly selected "useful" government documents, and would also like to receive a suggested list of documents with practical need. The Department of Library & Archives, State Library Division, has already begun to refer documents to the book selection committee and started plans for the workshop to be presented on a regional basis among the fifteen library regions in Kentucky.